Anti-Utopia and Dystopia: Rethinking the Generic Field

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If anxiety over the delimitation of the object of study constitutes the universal symptom of every emerging disciplinary field, the field of Utopian Studies — codified as such in the mid 1970s[1] — can be said to constitute a particularly vexed case. In his tellingly entitled "Utopia—The Problem of Definition", published in the inaugural year of The Society for Utopian Studies, Lyman Tower Sargent began by noting that "[t]he major problem facing anyone interested in utopian literature is the definition or, more precisely, the limitation of the field".[2] More recent forays, including Sargent's own, are wont to draw attention to the frustrating inflation of a term which has served polemical denunciation more frequently than analytical understanding, one which often indifferently includes not simply generically divergent kinds of literary texts, but also architectural plans and urban renewal projects, aesthetic and political manifestos, accounts emerging out of so-called "intentional communities", non-fictional blueprints on social transformation, or millenarian fantasies.[3] It is not the purpose of this essay to address the interpretive problems and questions raised in such chartings of Utopian terrain. What is more pertinent to my purposes here is to note that they have involved an increasing amount of attention to the nature and function of those literary and cultural genres that are taken to exempt themselves from any properly "Utopian" mainstream; namely, those of anti-Utopia and dystopia.

[1] For a brief account of this emergence see Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010 (orig. pub. 1990), p. xi.

[2] Lyman Tower Sargent, "Utopia—The Problem of Definition", *Extrapolation* 16, 1975, p. 137.

[3] See, indicatively, Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009 (orig. pub. 1982); Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" *Utopian Studies* 5(1), 1994, p. 1-37; and Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, op.cit.

One, two, many negations

Though both terms had come into circulation already in the 1950s in response to the emergence and popular success of works taken to aesthetically and substantively challenge a bygone Utopianism — works by Orwell, Huxley, Zamyatin, Koestler, and others — they did so while remaining either effectively interchangeable or incoherently framed.[4] The critical landscape since the mid 1970s — a period of a Utopian renaissance of sorts, at least in the domain of Science Fiction — has consequently involved the effort to extricate them from each other, grounding them in their respective discursive, historical, political and ideological specificities. Thus, while Lyman Tower Sargent's "Utopia-The Problem of Definition" had limited itself to three "simple categories" ("eutopia or positive Utopia", "dystopia or negative Utopia",

[4] See Tom Moylan's useful critical review of such early generic deployments in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 2000, p. 121-133.

and "satirical Utopia"[5]), his more recent "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" conceded that "anti-utopia is in common use as a substitute for dystopia, but as such it is often inaccurate, and it is useful to have a term to describe those works that use the utopian form to attack either utopias in general or a specific utopia".[6] In his own, better-known work, Fredric Jameson has moved from an earlier examination of the dialectic between Utopianism and anti-Utopian anxiety (in *Postmodernism*), to a critique of the tendency to cast Utopia and dystopia as terms in a "simple play of oppositions" (*The Seeds of Time*), to the concession that we need to distinguish at least certain varieties of dystopia from anti-Utopia — this last now being reserved for a "passion to denounce and to warn against Utopian programs in the political realm" that affiliates itself to Burkean conservatism as much as to "more contemporary anti-communisms and anti-socialisms".[7] Both of these critics, in turn, explicitly acknowledge their debt to the critical interventions of Tom Moylan, whose *Demand the Impossible* and *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* challenged the efficacy of a simple opposition between Utopia and dystopia by introducing the shaded, modulated categories of the "critical utopia" and the "critical dystopia" respectively.[8]

In the first case, and against the assumption that Utopia simply involves the projection of an image of society divested of the traces of conflict and antagonism,[9] Utopian possibility preserves itself through its own critical negation, for the "critical Utopias" Moylan locates in the work of Joanna Russ, Ursula LeGuin, Marge Piercy, or Samuel R. Delany in the 1970s involve depictions of utopian society "with its faults, inconsistencies, problems, and even denials of the utopian impulse in the form of the persistence of exploitation and domination in the better place".[10] In the second case, one which involves the SF work of LeGuin, Piercy, Octavia Butler, Kim Stanley Robinson and others in the 1990s, the object of critical negation is the "metapolitical" present — the neoliberal, corporate hegemony of "no alternative" — rather than a projected Utopian future. If "critical Utopias" thus involve an internal critique of the Utopian temptation for closure and totalization, the "critical dystopia" constitutes an internal critique of facile anti-utopianism, fusing the pessimism endemic to the "generic dystopia" with "an open, militant, utopian stance" that "self-reflexively refuses the anti-utopian temptation" lurking "in every dystopian account".[11] If it does relinquish all positive or substantive links to a Utopia conceived as program, it also stakes its political bets on what Fredric Jameson might call an "anti-anti-Utopianism".[12]

Toward a Typology of Sorts

How do such revisions of the standard, binary account of Utopia and its negation help us redraw the field of anti-utopian and dystopian textual practices? I will here restrict myself to providing a basic sketch of the generic sub-divisions that emerge within the broader terrain of anti-Utopia and dystopia. Taking anti-Utopias as representations which do not restrict themselves to an "internal" critique of Utopian visions but which move to a rejection of Utopianism from a position allegedly outside it — whether by locating themselves in hybrids of realism,

[5] Sargent, "Utopia—The Problem of Definition", op.cit., p. 143.

[6] Sargent, "The Three Faces", op.cit., p. 8.

[7] See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1991, p. 331-340; *The Seeds of Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 55-56; and *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, London/New York: Verso, 2005, p. 198-99.

[8] See Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, New York/London: Methuen, 1986, p. 10-11, 41-46; and *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, op.cit., p. 183-199. On critical dystopias see also Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (ed.), *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, London/New York: Routledge, 2003.

[9] See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, New York/London: Routledge, 1999, p. 100 ff. Interestingly, Stavrakakis cites the seminal work of Louis Marin (*Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert Vollrath, Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1984) to support his argument on Utopianism's tendency to repressive totality (p. 100); yet Marin's work obtains diametrically different implications for both Moylan (*Demand the Impossible*, op.cit., p. 38-39), and Jameson ("Of Islands and Trenches: Naturalization and the Production of Utopian Discourse", *Diacritics* 7(2), 1977, p. 2-21), where it serves to highlight the insufficiency of seeing Utopia in terms of a projected iconic image, emphasizing its conflictual, ambiguous nature as discursive process. For an account of the relationship between Utopian discourse's symptomatization of contradiction and antagonism and its production of conceptual novelty, see also Antonis Balasopoulos, "'Suffer a Sea Change': Spatial Crisis, Maritime Modernity and the Politics of Utopia", *Cultural Critique* 63, 2006, p. 122-156.

[10] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, op.cit., p. 44.

[11] Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, op.cit., p. 195.

[12] Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, op.cit., p. xvi.

pragmatism and cynicism or by affiliating themselves with "post-Utopian" political visions of justice, freedom and democracy — we might distinguish between five basic sub-categories of anti-Utopianism:

1.1. Satirical anti-Utopias

Here, I would group works which attack previous works or intellectual traditions by exposing them as impractically and unrealistically "Utopian", and which use this critique to delegitimize the authority of their prescriptions concerning the good life or the good society. Such works are necessarily both literary and fictional, as they deploy strategies that are specific to the realm of fictive discourse: framing, plot structure, references to "third-party", "authoritative" texts (either evoked approvingly in the target texts or ironically in the anti-Utopia), stylistic parody (though this last feature is also possible in non-fictional texts).[13] Texts that qualify for this sub-category show no interest in substituting what they expose as folly with more rational or functional alternatives, and therefore manifest no constructive will. What differentiates them from mere satire is the ideological consistency and concreteness of the direction of parody. Yet, though the parody may have implications for Utopian aspirations as a whole, these do not lead to a totalizing rejection of Utopianism as such. Hence, this can be characterized as a "weak" form of literary anti-Utopia. One might locate its generic prototype in as early a text as Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, though works like Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864), Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) or Charles Joseph Bayne's *The Fall of Utopia* (1900) provide more contemporary instances. The lack of significant twentieth-century satirical anti-Utopias suggests the historical atrophying of this generic possibility, which seems to have fallen victim to its very penchant for irresolution and ambiguity. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) seems to me closest to being the twentieth-century equivalent of the satirical anti-Utopia.

[13] The seminal studies here remain Robert C. Eliott's *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1970, esp. chapter 1, "Saturnalia, Satire and Utopia", p. 3-24; and Gary Saul Morson's *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's* Diary of a Writer *and the Traditions of Literary Utopia*, Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1988 (orig. pub. 1981), esp. Part 2, "Anti-Utopia as a Parodic Genre", p. 115-142.

1.2. Dogmatic fictional anti-Utopias

This category includes literary and fictional texts in which a Utopian vision associated either with a specific text or with a broader tradition is imagined as substantively realized, but with catastrophic results. Unlike works of the previous sub-category, these are not texts that content themselves with mocking the useless, impractical or nonsensical character of Utopian aspirations. Their target is rather the catastrophic potential of the Utopian impulse as such. Unlike dystopian works, they neither criticize the corrupt application or perversion of Utopian ideals, nor imagine a nightmarish future that has been gestated from the exacerbation of problems inherent in the historical present. Rather, they envision a society that does in fact realize the ideals of a Utopia (for instance, pacifism, gender equality, abolition of class exploitation, etc.) but suggest that once realized, such ideals would turn into agents of catastrophe. The implication is that, contrary to naïvely Utopian projections and expectations, human society is not an organism that functions optimally without making a number of concessions to its "fallen nature" (to greed, exploitation, hierarchy, injustice, etc.). Consequently, these are texts that tend to assume a fundamentally unchangeable, ahistorical definition of

what is "natural" to mankind. This is the "strong" version of literary and fictional anti-utopia and, I believe, a specifically *modern* one, as it does not have analogues in the classical or medieval tradition. Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), an account of the disaster that ensues when a majority of bees secedes from the beehive in search of virtue and honesty, might be taken as the generic prototype of this category, even though it is usually read as simple satire. Late nineteenth-century works focusing on the catastrophic consequences of the realization of socialism are particularly strong and visible constituents of this group: Anna Bowman Dodd's *The Republic of the Future: Or, Socialism a Reality* (1887) is a classic instance. I would also include the closely associated works that repudiate a Utopian prototype closely associated with a political ideology, as is the case with the cluster of works written to warn against the realization of the "Nationalist" principles of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888).[14] Given the disappearance of straightforwardly Utopian fictional models, this generic possibility also seems to have lapsed into dormancy in the course of the twentieth century.

[14] For a more extensive discussion of such texts in the nineteenth-century US context, see Kenneth M. Roemer, *The Obsolete Necessity: America in Utopian Writings, 1888-1900*, Kent, Oh: Kent State University Press, 1976; and Jean Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America, 1886-1896: The Politics of Form*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984, p. 78-94. Note that Pfaelzer's own designation for what I here term "dogmatic fictional anti-Utopias" is simply "dystopias" — a term which, as I've demonstrated, has acquired a rather different valence since the publication of her book.

1.3. Dogmatic non-fictional anti-Utopias

This category includes texts, particularly in the areas of social theory, suggesting that Utopianism is deeply flawed to the extent that the putative realization of what is theoretically *best* would in fact destroy all that is realizably *good*. Unlike the works of the second sub-category, they do not evoke imaginary projections, nor do they focus on a horrifying future; rather, the threat of Utopianism is diagnosed as a tendency existing in the present. Unlike what I will call pre-emptive anti-Utopias, they do not explicitly identify existing reality as Utopian or as a state that must remain completely unchangeable. And unlike dystopias, they do not involve a criticism of the dominant social order or a critique of *specific* Utopian premises. What is here seen as wrong with Utopia is not the possibility of its perversion, but rather its substance: the desire for totalizing solutions, the deluded character of Utopian dissatisfaction with the present, the reliance on abstract ideals rather than on the concrete wisdom of accumulated experience (personal and collective), etc. This is also a characteristically *modern* sub-species of anti-Utopia, born in the great upheavals of the Enlightenment and of the age of political revolutions. It is also one with a strong affiliation to the "common sense", empirical intellectual traditions of Anglo-American society; in fact, both fictional and non-fictional dogmatic anti-Utopia is frequently xenophobic, since the putative agents of catastrophe are identified with the ideas of *other* cultures and societies, particularly ones seen as having a proclivity for radicalism, violence, and revolution. My candidate for the generic prototype of this category would be Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), while contemporary pride of place should be given to that cornerstone of cold-war anti-utopianism that is Karl Popper's two-volume *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945).

1.4. Pre-emptive anti-Utopias

These would comprise fictional or non-fictional texts that neither en-

gage in the negation of the premises of Utopian texts or traditions nor deploy the device of catastrophic projections of the future. Rather, they explicitly suggest that existing reality is, in substance, already Utopian, and hence, that continuing dissatisfaction with it is implicitly or explicitly illegitimate or even dangerous. A late nineteenth-century example would be David Hilton Wheeler's *Our Industrial Utopia and its Unhappy Citizens* (1895); Francis Fukuyama's far more famous *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) might be considered an appropriate late twentieth-century equivalent.

1.5. Critical anti-Utopias

Under this rubric I would propose to group these works of non-fiction — particularly works in the areas of philosophy, psychoanalysis and political theory — which are opposed to Utopianism, but without either upholding the desirability of the current social order or rejecting the prospects of radical social change. Such texts do not tend to criticize specific Utopian texts. Their tendency is to presume the existence of "Utopianism", which they render synonymous with a number of inadmissible presuppositions, including the idea of the possibility and desirability of total social unity and harmony, the erasure of all antagonisms, the withering away of political sociality, the positive achievement of full community, the privileging of transcendence, or the emphasis on the deferral of radical change into an unspecified and essentially elusive future. Critical anti-utopianism is not traditionally associated with a conservative politics. It is in fact the dominant trend in post-1968 Left social thought and includes a number of well-known terminological/theoretical alternatives to Utopianism: Foucault's heterotopia; Deleuze and Guattari's pure immanence; Derrida's im/possible; Negri's constitutive disutopia;[15] and, albeit quite ambiguously, Badiou's notion of an evental rupture with the state of the situation.[16] One might say that this sub-category, a distinctly late modern one, has twin — and complexly entangled — roots both in Marx's own critique of the abstract predictions of Utopian Socialism and in Freud's and Lacan's ruthless exposure of the compensatory consolations of fantasy and the Imaginary.[17] The critical anti-Utopia can be said to share more with the critical Utopia than with any of the other sub-categories of anti-Utopia, though, unlike the latter, it involves an explicit rejection of a Utopian framework and terminological nomenclature.

I would distinguish dystopias from anti-Utopias on the following grounds: a) they do not presuppose or effect a total rejection of the Utopian impulse and of Utopian aspiration as such; b) their criticisms are emphatically subjective, i.e, explicitly marked as originating from the position of a concretely situated subject, rather than from a putatively objective position of evaluation; c) they are overwhelmingly narrative, rather than argumentative, in nature, and hence do not frequently include non-fictional forms; d) their orientation is politically and ideologically ambiguous, precisely for that reason.

Dystopias, mostly (though not entirely) subsumable within the domain of so-called science fiction, owe more to literary genres like melodrama

[15] See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York: Vintage, 1973, p. xviii-xix; "Of Other Spaces", trans. Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16(1), 1986, p. 22-27; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Reda Bensmaïa, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986; Jacques Derrida, "Marx and Sons", in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's* Specters of Marx, ed. Michael Sprinker, trans. G.M Goshgarian, New York/London: Routledge, 1999, p. 246-50; "Not Utopia, the Im-possible" (interview with Thomas Assheuer), in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 121-135; Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. Maurizia Boscagli, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 313-24; Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini, New York/London: Continuum, 2003, p. 235-247.

[16] The relationship between Badiou's "event" and the concept of Utopia is a complex question I intend to address more extensively elsewhere. Here, I will simply note that it consists in a vacillation between what I here call "critical anti-Utopia" and what Moylan has called "critical Utopia". To provide one example: if in a text like "One Divides itself into Two" (in *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, ed. Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis and Slavoj Žižek, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), Badiou juxtaposes utopia to the "passion for the real" which dominated the evental sequence 1917-1970, hence associating the term rather pejoratively with "ideologies" and the "imaginary" (p. 9), his more recent work on Plato rehabilitates Utopia by viewing it as the Imaginary transcoding of precisely such a Real. Hence, in the 13 January 2010 lecture for the seminar "Pour aujourd'hui: Platon!", Badiou excoriates conventional anti-utopianism's deployment "contre les orientations radicales, communistes, révolutionnaires" and adds that he will call "utopia" "that form of the Imaginary whose Symbolic is the Idea, and whose Real is, properly speaking, political action" ["on appellera utopie (pour entrer dans la polémique sur la question de l'utopie) cette forme imaginaire dont l'Idée est la forme symbolique en effet, et dont l'action

and the gothic (both dependent on sensationalism and narrative shocks, and both capable of very different political and ideological valences, depending on context and varieties of reader response) than to the expository style of anti-Utopia, whose political valences tend to be manifestly conservative (with the putative exception of the interestingly "anomalous" sub-category of critical anti-Utopia). They may be also divided into five basic sub-categories:

2.1. Dystopias of tragic failure

This is the one sub-category of dystopia that is largely independent of futurological Science Fiction as a preferred form. I would here include fictional, and sometimes non-fictional, texts that delve into the causes for the failure or abortion of an otherwise noble or virtuous Utopian scheme (or of an intentional community in non-fictional cases). Such causes may be attributed to fundamentals of "human nature", to ideological contradictions and the persistence of antagonisms, or to external circumstances such as violent repression; what remains crucial is that the failure is intended to be perceived as tragic, at least to a certain extent. Thus, the original Utopian goal is given a measure of dignity and nobility rather than being unambiguously discredited. A classic literary instance of a dystopia of tragic failure would be Mario Vargas Llosa's account of the military annihilation of the outcast commune of Canudos in *The War of the End of the World* (1981). Filmic examples might include Lars Von Trier's dramatization of the disintegration of a contemporary counter-cultural Utopia in *The Idiots* (1998); Stephan Ruzowitzky's account of the fortuitous birth and violent end of a turn-of-the-century peasant collective in *The Inheritors* [aka "The One-Seventh Farmers"] (1998); or M. Night Shyamalan's examination of the implosion of a Utopian "noble lie" in *The Village* (2004). The account of the formation, growth and final decline of the Brook Farm collective in Sterling Delano's *The Dark Side of Utopia* (2004) — one among many similar accounts of the birth, growth and death of "intentional communities" — suggests that non-fictional vectors are also possible in this sub-category. The dystopia of tragic failure involves significant overlaps with the critical Utopia; unlike it, however, it involves an element of unambiguous closure, for it explicitly posits the (violent or consensual) dissolution of the Utopian project as its narrative conclusion.

2.2. Dystopias of authoritarian repression

These are dystopias that, in identifying the State as the primary culprit for the perversion of Utopian impulses or principles, betray their reaction to the earlier twentieth century's hopes in the prospects of State revolution. Unlike the dogmatic varieties of fictional and non-fictional anti-Utopias, and unlike preemptive anti-Utopias, these texts are not *necessarily and immanently* anti-Utopian. The degree to which they dictate or presuppose a totalizing rejection of Utopianism or a protest against a finite form of its perversion thus remains open to critical debate. Further, unlike dogmatic fictional and non-fictional anti-Utopias, these are texts that do not see catastrophe as the result of the *substantive realization* of Utopian premises. What they dramatize is the *perversion* of the substantive core of Utopian principles, one in which

politique proprement dite est le reel"). Utopia, in other words, "designates that part of the Imaginary necessary for the subject's entry into the Symbolic and relation to the Real of action" ["'utopie' désigne cette part imaginaire requise pour que le sujet entre dans le symbolique et se rapporte au réel de l'action"]. See "Séminaire d' Alain Badiou (2009-2010)": http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/Badiou/09-10.2.htm.

[17] On Marx (and Engels's) brand of ambiguous anti-Utopianism see Vincent Geoghegan's comprehensive discussion in *Utopianism and Marxism*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008 (orig. pub. 1987), p. 39-54. For a view that takes both to task precisely on grounds of their lurking and unacknowledged Utopianism see Simon Tormey, "From Utopian Worlds to Utopian Spaces: Reflections on the Contemporary Radical Imaginary and the Social Forum Process," *Ephemera* 5(2), 2005, p. 394-408. Yannis Stavrakakis' *Lacan and the Political* is perhaps the most unambiguous instance of a Lacanian anti-Utopianism, one Stavrakakis sees as necessary for a politics of "radical democracy" (see esp. chapter 4, "Beyond the Fantasy of Utopia", as well as his more recent *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 259-267); more ambiguous are the explorations in the possibilities of the Utopian mode in essays by Daniel Bergeron ("Utopia and Psychosis: The Quest for the Transcendental"), Juliet Flower MacCannell ("Nowhere Else: On Utopia"), and Adrian Johnston ("A Blast from the Future: Freud, Lacan, Marcuse and Snapping the Threads of the Past"), all collected in a 2008 special issue the psychoanalytic journal *Umbr(a)* dedicated to Utopia. Slavoj Žižek's own approach to Utopianism, one which includes a critique of Stavrakakis own deployment, is far too unstable to summarize here with any brevity, but it does seem to involve a gradual shift in the direction of affirmative rehabilitation, much in the way that Badiou's does. See particularly his *In Defense of Lost Causes*, London/New York: Verso, 2008.

institutionalization, rationalization, and bureaucracy play key roles. In essence, the dystopia of authoritarian repression suggests that "the letter killeth": Utopia has been realized only as empty *form*, lacking any authentic and vital *content*. It has therefore become effectively suicidal or auto-destructive, for it has predicated collective happiness on the deployment of State terror, surveillance, iron discipline, and intolerance. The dystopia of authoritarian repression shares much with the critical Utopia, but is distinguishable from it on the basis of its tendency to privilege narrative closure and subjective despair. The characteristic examples of this genre are quite well-known and tend to be concentrated in the first half of the twentieth century: Zamyatin's *We* (1921),[18] Orwell's *1984* (1948),[19] and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) (Margaret Atwood's vision of theocratic totalitarianism in *The Handmaid's Tale* [1985] is rather an exception in this regard). Gary Ross's film *Pleasantville* (1998) constitutes a thoroughly intriguing attempt at diagnosing authoritarian repression as a principle capable of operating without the direct involvement of the State and hence as one that may be active even in so-called "liberal" societies. Dostoevsky's parable of the "Grand Inquisitor" in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) might be considered a vital generic foundation for the political theology of the State that is exposed to critique in all such texts.

[18] On the generic complications surrounding *We* and the history of its reception in the West, see Philip Wegner's reading of the novel as a dystopia that is not closed to Utopian possibilities (rather than as an anti-Utopia) in *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 2002, p. 147-172.

[19] "Unlike the conservative writers of overt anti-utopias", Moylan notes, "Orwell sought to counter the utopia-gone-wrong that embodied the central plan and the authoritarian mind with what might be called a 'critical anti-utopia', one that could possibly make people conscious of what might happen and therefore work to avert it" (*Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, op.cit., p. 162). As I have reserved the term "critical anti-Utopia" for a historically and discursively different body of work, I have not adopted Moylan's generic designation in this case.

2.3. Dystopias of catastrophic contingency

This is an older tradition than that of the dystopias of authoritarian repression, and ironically, one which has outlived them: it includes all dystopias in which the fundamental agent of catastrophe is contingent — alien invasion, a virus, collision with a meteorite, unforeseen biological mutation, and so on. H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898) is probably the most prominent progenitor of this sub-category, which can be said to live on in the abidingly popular legacy of twentieth-century "disaster films". Dystopias of catastrophic contingency may involve criticism or satire against the agency of the State or the dysfunctionality of extant social institutions, but they do not attribute the primary cause of disaster to them. They thus remain far less political in character than dystopias of authoritarian repression, and tend to be far more easily drawn to populist, largely right-wing varieties of apocalypticism and survivalism. Along with dystopias of tragic failure, they are "weak" dystopias, in the sense that they make no explicit or generalizing pronouncements on the character of the prevailing social and political order. Unlike them, however, they involve no empathetic engagement with lost utopian prospects.

2.4. Nihilistic dystopias

Primarily coming into its own in the 1980s, effectively identical with what is known as cyberpunk, and counting among its progenitors the work of Philip K. Dick, J. G. Ballard, and William S. Burroughs, this is a generic sub-category which combines "dirty realism" with a diffuse and often ideologically incoherent attack on the existing social order. Unlike dystopias of authoritarian repression, nihilistic dystopias tend to privilege the multinational corporation over the State, and technological mutation over social policy in their accounts of bureaucratization and social decay. They also tend to be far more agnostic as regards

a possible set of affirmable collective values. They share in the apocalypticism of dystopias of catastrophic contingency, though their realism involves a far more emphatic critical dimension as regards existing social institutions and practices. They are "strong" dystopias, for they do involve generalizing and consequential pronouncements on the character of the present and of the putative future. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) is, as Carl Freedman notes, "the undisputed paradigm and only generally recognized masterwork" of this sub-category.[20] Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982) is also frequently associated with the nihilistic dystopianism of cyberpunk, despite being based on Philip K. Dick's much earlier "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" (1968).

[20] Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, Hanover, NH: Wesleyan/University Press of New England, 2000, p. 195.

2.5. Critical dystopias

Emerging in the 1990s, these are texts that see the present technological, ecological and socio-political order of things as bound for catastrophe. The apocalyptical element of dystopias of contingency and nihilistic dystopias is not missing, but it is tempered by a more concerted and coherent analysis of problematic or dangerous tendencies in the existing world and by an affective resistance toward the nihilistic temperament. Unlike dystopias of tragic failure, critical dystopias are not preoccupied with the melancholy account of the degeneration of an originally noble or virtuous attempt at realizing Utopia. And unlike dystopias of authoritarian repression, they do not focus on the all-consuming repressiveness of the State. In fact, like critical anti-Utopias, critical dystopias are effectively an anomaly within their broader group, for they share less with other forms of dystopia than with the tradition of critical Utopianism. Their difference from the latter is largely a matter of emphasis rather than substance: in the critical Utopia, faith in Utopian vision prevails, albeit tempered by reflexive skepticism; in the critical dystopia, it is the condemnation of the existent order that takes precedence, but not as something that precludes affirmative investment in the possibility of radical change and a different future. This close logical link between the critical dystopia and the critical Utopia explains why authors like Piercy or LeGuin figure prominently in both traditions.

Systemic overlaps and complications

Of course, virtually none of these ten generic sub-categories can be taken as "pure" or seen as insulated from varieties of cross-generic interference and interplay. Indeed, such interference or code-scrambling occurs across the divide between anti-Utopia and dystopia. Hence, critical anti-Utopias, critical dystopias and critical Utopias share the active dissatisfaction with the political and social order of the present social order, but with different degrees of skepticism about the viability or sustainability of Utopian visions or aspirations. A more controversial conjuncture concerns dogmatic fictional anti-Utopias and dystopias of authoritarian repression: Zamyatin or Orwell have frequently been read as anti-Utopian authors, since it is not always easy to determine the boundary between envisioning the substantive fulfillment of the Utopian ideal *itself* as an authoritarianism-inducing disaster and ad-

dressing that disaster as the result of the radical perversion or internal betrayal of the ideal. The explosive ambiguities of Dostoevsky's legend of the Grand Inquisitor are, I think, emblematic of this problem.[21] The frequent tendency to group Huxley's *Brave New World* with Zamyatin and Orwell's novels rather than with other anti-Utopian satires also suggests the existence of important areas of interference between what currently remains of traditions of anti-Utopian satire and the dystopia of authoritarian repression. Not accidentally, Ross' *Pleasantville,* which I have placed in a group that also includes Orwell and Zamyatin, abounds in satirical elements — particularly as regards the addictive vacuity involved in the cult appeal of vintage "family sitcoms" — which are not always politically consequential or relevant to the critique of the authoritarian underside of 1950s conformism. The "weak" character of subcategories like the satirical anti-Utopia and the dystopia of tragic failure also makes them capable of cross-generic overlap, since the two are often distinguished by emphasis and tonality (sarcastic and corrosive in the first case, melancholy and wistful in the second) rather than by differences of substance (Utopia proves an unrealizable dream in both cases): the well-known ambiguities of Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* or of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" (1877) are emblematic of this possibility.

[21] Badiou's emphasis on the reactive nature of Evil provides an important methodological basis for revisiting this question by bypassing the "relativist" cliché that the relevant critical distinction is simply a matter of "perspective". See his remarks on the three forms of Evil's derivation from the Good (simulacrum and terror, betrayal, and the forcing of the unnameable) in *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, London/New York: Verso, 2001, p. 72-87; and the reflections on "internal betrayal" and the perversion of activist saintliness into priesthood in *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 38-39.

The overlaps between dystopias of catastrophic contingency and nihilistic dystopias are less prone to challenge the primary distinction between anti-Utopia and dystopia, since they occur within the same broader generic field: the dystopia of catastrophic contingency may be said to mobilize forms of apocalyptic jouissance that are also involved in nihilistic dystopia, while the latter's tendency to political incoherence is in part due to its acceptance of the importance of contingent factors. The increasing concern with eco-catastrophe has rendered possible the cross-pollination of dystopias of catastrophic contingency and critical dystopias, primarily in the direction of seeing future catastrophe as less than contingent and, simultaneously, in that of allowing for relevantly depoliticized and depoliticizing responses to it (see for instance a film like Roland Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow* [2004], where the pronounced critique of the ecological indifference of late capitalist societies is combined with a ludicrously individualistic narrative plot).

Pre-emptive anti-Utopias, finally, seem only capable of a limited degree of overlap with other anti-Utopian varieties (dogmatic fictional and non-fictional anti-Utopias) and of none with dystopian varieties. This does not render them culturally insignificant, as pre-emptive anti-Utopianism is a dominant feature of the mass media discourse of liberal capitalism, and was conceivably a dominant feature of the state propaganda of actually existing socialism as well. Indeed, it is perhaps its effectively neutralizing nature as much as its inherent resistance to narrative extrapolation that blocks the possibility of hybridization with other varieties of anti-Utopianism or dystopianism.